**What Is Effective Comprehension Instruction?**

By: Texas Education Agency

Effective comprehension instruction is instruction that helps students to become independent, strategic, and metacognitive readers who are able to develop, control, and use a variety of comprehension strategies to ensure that they understand what they read. To achieve this goal, comprehension instruction must begin as soon as students begin to read and it must: be explicit, intensive, and persistent; help students to become aware of text organization; and motivate students to read widely.

**Explicit, intensive, persistent instruction**

To become good readers, most students require explicit, intensive, and persistent instruction.[1] In explicit comprehension strategy instruction, the teacher chooses strategies that are closely aligned with the text students are reading. The teacher models and "thinks aloud" about what a given strategy is and why it is important, helps students learn how, when, and where to use the strategy, and gives students opportunities to apply the strategy on their own.

Modeling is followed by practice, guided by the teacher, who works with students to help them figure out how and when to use the strategy themselves. As students read, the teacher provides feedback and engages them in discussion. In subsequent lessons, the teacher asks students to apply the strategy on their own to other texts.2

Students are encouraged to plan before reading so that reading has a clear goal or purpose, to continually monitor their understanding during reading, and to apply repair strategies when breakdowns in understanding occur. To improve self-monitoring, the teacher may model for students how to do one or all of the following:

* think about what they already know before they start reading and during reading;
* be aware of whether they understand what they are reading;
* employ strategies to identify difficult words, concepts, and ideas;
* ask themselves: "Does this make sense?"; and
* be aware of how a particular text is organized.

One of the most important features of explicit instruction is the teacher's gradual release to students of responsibility for strategy use, with the goal that students apply strategies independently. However, teachers do not ask students to work on their own until the students have demonstrated that they understand a strategy and how and when to use it.3

**Awareness of Text Organization**

Text organization refers to the physical patterns and literary conventions of a particular text structure, or genre. The ability to identify and take advantage of text organization can contribute to students' comprehension.4 The two major text structures, narrative and expository, place different demands on readers' comprehension.

**Narrative Text.** Broadly defined, narrative text tells a story. It is found in the form of short stories, folktales, tall tales, myths, fables, legends, fantasies, science fiction — even in the reporting of news stories or in biographies and autobiographies. The narrative structure most often features a beginning, middle, and an ending. It most often also features clear story elements, or story grammar, including:

* characters
* settings
* themes
* a central problem, or conflict
* a sequence of events that form a story line, or plot
* a resolution to the conflict

Helping students learn to identify recurring story grammar elements provides them with a story schema. When they encounter a new narrative text, students can then call on this story schema to make predictions about what might happen in the story, to visualize settings or characters, or summarize plot events. Instructional practices that facilitate students' understanding of narrative text include:

* focusing discussions on story elements and encouraging students to relate story events and characters to their own experiences;
* encouraging students to compare the structure of one story to that of other stories they have read; and
* preparing visual guides, such as story maps of the structure of a story, to help them recall specific story elements.

**Expository Text.** Broadly defined, expository text is factual. Its primary purpose is to inform, explain, or persuade. Examples of expository texts are textbooks, biographies and autobiographies, newspapers, diaries, journals, magazines, brochures, and catalogues.

Most of the reading students do throughout their schooling — indeed, throughout their lives — will involve expository text. Without an understanding of the organization of such text, students often have difficulty understanding what they read. Unlike a narrative, an expository text has no familiar story line to guide students' reading. To read expository texts successfully, students must learn that authors may use a variety of structures to organize their ideas, including cause-and-effect or compare and contrast relationships, time-and-order sequences, and problem-solution patterns. Indeed, students need to know that authors may use some or all of these structures in any given chapter or section of a text.

Students also need to learn that expository text can differ from narrative text in the way it is presented on a page. For example, expository text may be organized by means of text headings and subheadings, and may contain extensive graphics, such as tables, charts, diagrams, and illustrations. Instructional practices that facilitate students' understanding of expository text include helping them learn how to:

* chunk information in a text by grouping related ideas and concepts;
* summarize important information in a text by grouping related ideas and concepts;
* integrate information in a text with existing knowledge;
* apply information in a text to real-world situations;
* interpret and construct graphics such as charts, tables, and figures;
* synthesize information from different texts; and
* develop presentations about the text.

**Motivation to Read Widely**

Motivating students to read widely is integral to comprehension instruction. Motivation plays an important part both in helping students learn to read and in promoting higher levels of literacy.[5] Wide reading experiences enhance students' abilities to comprehend an increasingly wider array of text types and texts of increasing difficulty.

It is no surprise that students who are good readers read a great deal-both in school and on their own. They read a variety of texts for a variety of purposes-to learn, to keep informed, to satisfy curiosity, and to entertain themselves.

The reading experiences, attitudes, and perspectives of students determine the ways in which they perceive the purpose of reading and value its benefits. Instructional practices to promote students' motivation to read widely include:

* providing daily opportunities for students to read both self-selected and teacher-and peer-recommended texts; and
* providing frequent opportunities for both student- and teacher-led discussions of what students are reading.
* organizing cooperative learning groups in which students can discuss what they read, help each other choose the strategies that are most appropriate for a specific text;
* encouraging students to read so as to learn about a concept or topic that is meaningful to them;
* involving students actively in reading-related activities;
* encouragement for students to read independently; and
* opportunities for students to choose from texts that reflect different genres and reading levels.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/29201/>